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Digital Citizenship

Students are spending an increased amount of time online. During this time, they are communicating with their peers, as well as consuming, sharing and creating content. In the past, banning the use of personal devices and blocking online content was seen as a way to protect students from harmful content and protect the school's technology infrastructure. However, as Inspiring Education encourages school authorities to support students to become ethical citizens and engaged thinkers who use technology to create and share knowledge, these policies may need to be reconsidered.

As technology becomes more integrated into students' lives and educational experiences, school authorities are exploring digital citizenship as an alternate approach. Digital citizenship encourages students to respect themselves, others and intellectual property, while at the same time learning to think critically about protecting themselves and others from harmful content and behaviours online.

Recognizing that students have digital lives and benefit from the use of technology, schools have the opportunity to help students build the skills they need to become responsible citizens in the global online community.

What Does Digital Citizenship Look Like?

- Digital citizenship acknowledges that digital communities, like all communities, need to have a balance of member rights and responsibilities in order to create and sustain the community. This places the rights and responsibilities of citizenship at the heart of digital citizenship.
- Digital citizenship is about balancing personal empowerment and responsibility with community well-being. It is about enabling open access for learning while protecting student safety.

Why Is Digital Citizenship Important?

The Internet offers students many opportunities for learning and social interaction. It also brings the potential for dangers and risks, such as cyberbullying and identity theft. Digital citizenship skills allow students to develop a framework for responsible technology use, preparing them for success in learning and in life.

Many students, at home or through their personal devices, have unfettered access to the Internet for learning and entertainment. Educators have an important role to play in preparing students for the digital world and helping them develop the digital and media literacies identified in the *Ministerial Order on Student Learning (001/2013)*.

Digital citizenship will also need to be considered when the new Education Act is proclaimed, as the Act requires that school authorities establish codes of conduct for students to help provide a welcoming, caring, respectful and safe learning environment for all students. According to the Act, the code of conduct must include one or more statements about what is acceptable behaviour and what is unacceptable behaviour, whether or not it occurs within the school building, during the school day or by electronic means.

Recent research indicates:

- On average, 9 to 16-year-olds spend 88 minutes per day online;
- 95% of teens aged 12 to 17 are Internet users;
- Internet usage among teens is higher than usage by adults as a whole.

Alberta Ministry of Education. (2012) Digital Citizenship Policy Development Guide. Retrieved from the Ministry of Education website: http://www.education.alberta.ca/media/6735100/digital%20citizenship%20policy%20development%20guide.pdf

- 74% of teens aged 12 to 17 have mobile access to the Internet (phone, tablet, etc.); and
- 82% of teens have posted their birthday on social media; and
- 24% have posted videos of themselves on social media.

Brenner, J. (May 21, 2012). Pew Internet: Teens. Retrieved from http://www.pewinternet.org/Commentary/2012/April/Pew-Internet-Teens.aspx

Alberta Government

Resources

Digital Citizenship Policy Development Guide

Alberta Education's School Technology Branch has developed a policy development guide to provide guidance to leaders as they make decisions about digital citizenship at their school authority.
http://bit.ly/digcitizenshippolicy

Mike Ribble, *Digital Citizenship in Schools, 2nd edition*

This book explains the relevance and importance of digital citizenship and helps educators integrate digital citizenship into the classroom.
http://bit.ly/ribbledigcitizenship

UNICEF's Digital Citizenship and Safety Video

This video speaks to empowerment through online communities.
http://bit.ly/unicefdigcitizenship

MediaSmarts Resources

MediaSmarts offers several digital citizenship resources for use in Alberta classrooms including MyWorld (Grades 9-12) and Passport to the Internet (Grades 4-8).
http://bit.ly/mediasmartsresources

Feedback

Please provide feedback on this briefing:
http://bit.ly/techbrieffeedback

Digital Citizenship and Your School Authority

Your school authority has an important role to play in preparing students to live, work and share in digital environments. Some key questions for you to consider include:

- Which stakeholders should be involved in creating a vision for digital citizenship in your school authority and identifying the desired c tcomes?
- What skills and competencies are needed to empower school leaders and educators to model responsible use of technology? How can your school authority assist its staff in developing these skills and competencies?
- What skills do students need to learn to be responsible digital citizens? What are some ways that students can learn these skills?
- How will your school authority's approach to personally owned devices shape what kinds of guidance are needed for digital citizenship?

Next Steps

- Have discussions with other senior leaders about digital citizenship and what it means in your school authority.
- Consider using the Digital Citizenship Needs Assessment Tool (http://bit.ly/digcitizenshipassessment) to help your school authority identify areas that it may need to address.

Questions?

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